



# CATAWBA COUNTY

P.O. BOX 669    Newton, North Carolina    28658-0669    (828) 695-5600  
FAX (828) 695-2497

**Department of Social Services**

## PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Amber Herman – 828-695-5749 or  
[amberherman@mail.co.catawba.nc.us](mailto:amberherman@mail.co.catawba.nc.us)

### **FBCV receives national award for adoption excellence**

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has recognized Catawba County Social Services for its excellence in promoting adoption and streamlining the judicial process for adoption.

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson announced on November 22 the selection of 18 individuals and organizations as recipients of the department's Adoption Excellence Awards, given annually since 1997. The awards honor states, organizations, businesses, individuals and families for giving abandoned, neglected or abused children a loving family and a safe and nurturing home.

"The people and organizations we honor with these excellence awards are real heroes to the many children who need loving homes and families," Secretary Thompson said. "These awards reflect our appreciation for their commitment and big hearts as we all strive to help so many children across the country."

From 1998 through 2002, Family Builders of Catawba Valley (FBCV), the adoption unit of Catawba Valley Social Services, increased the county's adoption rate by 50 percent, decreasing the county's foster care population. More children exited the county's custody. And the median number of days in foster care decreased from 18 months to 11 months.

FBCV carried out major system reforms to realize these achievements, including a Court Improvement Initiative and an expanded adoption recruitment program to address the disproportionate number of African-American children in foster care.

The Adoption Excellence awards grew out of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. This law provided unprecedented financial incentives for states to increase adoptions, made safety of children the paramount consideration for determining placement, and mandated swifter time frames for permanent placement decisions.

Approximately 180 children live in foster care in Catawba County, while an estimated 131,000 children in public foster care nationwide are waiting for adoptive homes. The majority of these children have special needs, such as a history of maltreatment; physical, mental or learning disabilities; older age (between 7 and 16); or are part of a sibling group.

More than 50,000 children were adopted from public child welfare agencies last year. Family Builders finalized adoptions for 85 children in foster care in Catawba County last year. Another 85 children were safely reunited with their parents.

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“This award is an incredible honor for the agency and for Catawba County,” said Beth Brandes, assistant director of Catawba County Social Services. “But it certainly wasn’t achieved individually. The success of our adoption program is due to great partnerships with other organizations such as the judicial system, Guardian ad Litem, faith communities, foster parent association, schools, area media, the departments of Mental Health and Public Health, and many others that provide support and help to the agency and to the children in our care.”

Award recipients are chosen by a committee representing non-profit adoption agencies, child welfare and adoption advocates, adoptive parents, foundations, the business community, and state and federal offices. This year, the panel reviewed 70 nominations and chose 18 winners in six categories of excellence.

“It is gratifying to confer this honor on a group of people who really are making a difference for children,” said Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., assistant secretary for children and families. “They stand as examples of the many thousands of others across the country who are helping foster children move to permanent, stable and loving homes.”

The winners by category are:

#### **Judicial or child welfare system improvement**

- 1] Massachusetts Coalition for Permanency for Children, Leverett, Mass.
- 2] Erie County Court Improvement Project, Buffalo, N.Y.
- 3] Catawba County Department of Social Services, Newton, N.C.

#### **Increased permanency for children with special needs**

- 1] Esther Conyers, The Village for Families and Children, Inc., Hartford, Conn.
- 2] Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Springfield, Ill.
- 3] Faith House, St. Louis, Mo.
- 4] Partnership for Adoptions, Chesterfield, Va.

#### **Support for Adoptive Families**

- 1] The Kinship Center, Adoption and Seedling Clinics, Santa Ana, Calif.
- 2] Mical Anne Morrill, St. Paul, Minn.
- 3] Child-Rite, Inc., Taos, N.M.

#### **Public Awareness**

- 1] African American Adoption Agency, St. Paul, Minn.
- 2] Indiana’s Adoption Initiative, Indianapolis, Ind.

#### **Individual and/or family contributions**

- 1] Tom and Elizabeth Richmond, Peoria, Ill.
- 2] Allison Rosati, Chicago, Ill.
- 3] Jess McDonald, Springfield, Ill.
- 4] Brenda Krause Eheart, Rantoul, Ill.

**MORE**

## **Philanthropy**

1] Daunte Culpepper, St. Paul, Minn.

2] Freddie Mac Foundation, McLean, Va.

Family Builders of Catawba Valley envisions that through customized, family-based services, every child in the custody of Catawba County will discover a safe, loving and permanent home. Resource families may choose to foster, adopt, provide respite care or become a visiting resource for children waiting to find a permanent home. A Resource Family Information Meeting will be held at Family Builders on December 10 at 6 p.m. to provide general information about foster care and adoption. For more information, contact FBCV at 828-465-8901 or stop by the office at 507 Boundary Street, Conover.

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